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Dedicated to Esther Morris

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Photographs compliments of Art Department

*Prize Winning Contributions

*I've been watching the world
On its marijuana cruise
Its tortured mind hidden and curled
Swollen with the soma of booze.
A fool, I cry then laugh at the sight
One hand claws at the wrong
The other soothes at the right
And I hear a generation cry
"Where do I belong?"*

S. L. Nichols

Earth's End

During the humid sweltering months, people seek retreats from the black tar and sweat of the city. The humid air is replaced with the fresh cool air of the mountains. Such a retreat is Earth's End, an old chalet left by its owner to those who seek solace. There the grass remains plush and green; leaves of giant oaks and elms are crisp, unwilted; moss carpets the foundation, stabilizing the chalet.

The brook beside the chalet is crystal clear. An old brick well covered by ivy is connected to the brook by an underground stream. Drinking water is ice cold.

Unlimited is the garden filled with wild daisies, clover and lady slippers. Mountain Laurel dots the premises with white blossoms.

During the night frogs croak out their songs, wild cats prowl and screech their attacks. All the while the chalet remains peaceful, serene, and beds down for the night nestled in the safety of the pines.

Leaves begin their change early. Toward the end of September crimson reds, brilliant oranges and yellows dot the branches of trees. Traveling up the dirt roads the air becomes colder. An old rusted iron gate steadied by stone pillars leads to Earth's End. Ivy now crumbles to the touch. The distant road ahead is covered by overgrowth and fallen leaves. All is quiet. Infrequently birds can be heard shouting their warning of an intruder.

Suddenly the chalet looms ahead. Briars from the dead rose bushes cover the patio and pathway to the door. The wind bends the trees with its intensity, shadowed peaks peer at the path with scorn and age. Before long it is time to bank the house for the cold months ahead.

Dusk comes earlier. Overnight the estate becomes white-washed in a cover of snow. Few visitors come to the chalet now, only infrequent checks are made to secure. Earth's End is alone, anticipating the cold's destruction.

Icicles hang from the porch and trees. Tiny imprints can be seen near the brook made by deer and smaller animals in

search of water only to be disappointed by the frozen thickness of the ice. Dead stubble of the once gay flowers can be seen above the snow vaguely remembering their beauty.

In the evening the moon casts its glow over the crusted, unblemished snow. Trees cast eerie shadows, not even the birds utter a sound.

Birds chirp, buds burst through, it is the time for coming alive. The last remains of snow soon melt, grass appears no worse from the long cold months, ivy begins its ascent up the chimney, and delicate rose buds appear on the brown briars. The iron gate has become more rusted and a few more stones have fallen from the pillars, but the chalet survives the long cold siege. Discarding the ice after months of snow, the brook again babbles along the hillside.

The chalet is opened, a fire is started to dry out the dampness. The windows open to the gentle breeze and Earth's End prepares once again for the city escapists.

Nancy Wiley

Again Adrift

*again adrift
amidst the ogred earth*

*ah! sweet lady
there is, i fear
a wicked sneer
beneath the trees so shady*

*sun scorched
our beardless judas
denies his predilection
for fried succulent savages
then turns towards crucifixion*

*bereft, beauteous love
of deeds to leap
to, dreams to sleep
to, brought me by a dove*

*a dribbling dam
of drowning derision
am i upon bed or chair
surveying your rivered body
to turn a torrential thousand superlatives
into channels of crucifixion*

*gracious god grant me heaven
and dear lady mine
you will in time
learn to love me like a lemon*

Paul Allen

KRESHA

a play
in
one
act
by

*Brian
Marsh*

Characters

Clarence Digbee — *middle-aged with greying hair — medium height — wears tattered jacket over somewhat wrinkled clothing.*

Mrs. Digbee — *about the same age as her husband although slightly taller and thinner — wears all black*

Jonathon — *fairly young — tall — wears a yellow scarf about his neck — long hair.*

Komarov — *middle-aged — big build — dressed in working clothes*

Kresha — *young — medium height — well-dressed*

The Stranger — *old — white hair over his forehead — dressed in long black coat*

Prelude: *Greig's "Hall of the Mountain King" plays softly in the background.*

Curtain Rises:

(Stage is dark. All characters on stage except The Stranger. Murmurs of surprise and confusion from actors and actresses.)

Mrs. D.: Clarence, turn those lights back on!

Digbee: *(Voice is somewhat fuzzy due to over-use of alcohol)*
But I didn't turn them off, dear.

Mrs. D.: Will someone turn those lights on??

Lights come up gradually. Stage, however, remains in semi-darkness. A table and three chairs become visible at center stage. A bench is revealed in front of the table close to the edge of the stage. A small window is at left, bor-

dered by a completely blank wall. Murmurs increase as the setting becomes clear. Characters appear very confused.

Digbee: Where the hell are we?

Jonathon: This must be a dream.

Mrs. D.: I don't know how we got here, but let's get out, Clarence. Where's the door?

Jonathon: There doesn't seem to be one. (*looks around*)

Mrs. D.: Ridiculous. Have you ever seen a room without a door? Clarence, find the door.

Digbee: Yes, dear. (*looks around quickly*) I don't think there is one.

Mrs. D.: Keep looking. There's got to be a door around here somewhere.

Kresha: This is all so cold, so . . . unreal. It's as if we were all . . . dead.

Mrs. D.: Dead? Nonsense, girl. I'm as alive as I ever was.

Digbee: If we're dead, maybe this is heaven.

Mrs. D.: Heaven? Clarence, you're as much of a fool as the day I married you. Heaven . . . hump . . . some heaven. (*glances around quickly*) Looks more like hell to me. What's that? (*points to an object on the floor*)

Digbee: (*picks it up*) Why . . . it's a can of beer. I knew this was heaven. (*sits at the table, regarding his prize*)

Komarov: You fools. This is some kind of trick. They've made slaves out of you and now they are trying to crush you. Strike out against them now, before it's too late. *Actors pay no attention to Komarov who sits down heavily at the table, an angry look on his face.*

Digbee: Damn it!

Mrs. D.: What now?

Digbee: (*sobbingly*) I haven't got anything to open it with.

Mrs. D.: Stop sniffling and try to find a way out of here.

Jonathon: Friends in a dream (*addresses all characters*), I greet you. Do not be sad, for dreams are God's gift to men, wherein we can forget ourselves — and forget ourselves we must, if we are to survive. So come, be happy. Enjoy our time together — a time so soon to pass.

Jonathon remains standing, as if in a trance, for a few moments. Characters, however, pay no attention to him.

Mrs. D.: (*regards the window with disdain*) Look at this window. It's so dirty I can't see a thing out of it. (*makes motions as if to clean it*) Oh . . . I can't get it clean. Girl, come clean this window.

Kresha approaches the window.

Kresha: But it is clean, ma'am. Can't you see? There are so many things: colors and shapes; so many things. I don't know how to describe it.

Mrs. D.: Stop talking nonsense. I can see with my own eyes that that window is filthy.

Jonathon and Komarov, apparently interested, approach the window. Digbee remains seated, still brooding over his beer.

Jonathon: No, it is clean. I can see a meadow and a hill . . . and a little winding stream . . . trees are there too, bending now under the breeze . . .

Komarov: Ha! I told you it was a trick. Now they're making you believe you're seeing things. (*roughly pushes the others aside to get a better view of the window*) There's a field out there. People are working. There is a sign that reads: "Work for the State; Equal Shares for All". All of you must be blind.

Mrs. D.: Clarence, tell these crazy people that this window is dirty.

Digbee, still in sorrow, glumly approaches the window. His face lightens, however, when he looks through it.

Digbee: It's a brewery. Where's the door? (*moves about frantically*)

Mrs. D.: Clarence, you're as crazy as the rest of them.

Digbee: Darn, forgot, no door. (*resumes his seat, glancing wistfully at the can of beer*) Beer sets the world on fire,

but the man that has a can opener rules the world. *Kresha moves to the bench and sits down. Lights go down in background. Lights up on Kresha. After a slight pause, Digbee approaches the bench and sits beside Kresha. All other characters remain motionless in the background.*

Digbee: Hi there.

Kresha: Hello.

Digbee: What's your name?

Kresha: Kresha.

Digbee: Clarence Digbee. (*pause*) Uh . . . Kresha? What say we get out of here — just the two of us?

Kresha: There is no way out, you know that. And besides, Mr. Digbee, you're married.

Digbee: Oh, yes, that is a problem. But forget about that. Suppose we could get out, would you come with me?

Kresha: And what would we do when we did get out? We haven't any place to go, nothing to do . . .

Digbee: We could open a bar. I could be the bartender and you could be —

Kresha: (*interrupting*) No thanks. I'd rather stay here.

Digbee: Here? In this hole. A girl like you needs excitement. Why, we could set the world afire.

Kresha: No, Mr. Digbee, I won't go with you.

Digbee: Why not? What's the matter with me?

Kresha: You're a drunk.

Digbee: Me? Whatever gave you that idea?

Kresha: Please go away, Mr. Digbee.

Digbee: Aw . . . (*reluctantly moves back to the table*)
Komarov moves to stage right close to the edge of the stage. He sees Kresha, pauses a moment, and then addresses her in a gruff voice.

Komarov: You, come here!

Kresha: What do you want?

Komarov: Come here! We are going to leave this place now.

Kresha: How? There is no door.

Komarov: (*belligerently*) We will fight. We will overthrow the fools who are imprisoning us.

Kresha: What are you talking about?

Komarov: I'm talking about revolting against our oppressors, casting them out and building a new state — a state of workers — workers with equal shares.

Kresha: And what of me?

Komarov: You? ... You will work and bear children in support of the state.

Kresha: Is that what we must do, live to support the state?

Komarov: Of course, the state is all-important.

Kresha: You're a fool.

Komarov: (*angrily*) No one calls Komarov a fool. Come, I'll show you the fool I am. (*grabs her by the arm*)

Kresha: Leave me alone. I'll never go with you. (*Komarov drops her arm roughly*)

Komarov: So they've poisoned your mind too. Stay here, then, and rot.

Komarov moves angrily back to his former position and, after a slight pause, Jonathan approaches the bench and sits.

Jonathon: Kresha?

Kresha: Yes?

Jonathon: Kresha ... such a pretty name. What are you doing out here?

Kresha: Thinking ... thinking about why we are all here, where we are going. This is all so confusing.

Jonathon: It's a dream, Kresha, pay it no mind — it will soon be over.

Kresha: Yes, I suppose it will.

Jonathon: Kresha, wouldn't you like to go to a world of great beauty?

Kresha: Yes, but where is this world?

Jonathon: In our minds and in our imaginations . . .

Kresha: In our dreams?

Jonathon: Yes, dreams.

Kresha: One cannot live always in dreams. Isn't reality important?

Jonathan: Reality? What is that? Are you real? Your beauty is beyond reality — you can be nothing less than a dream.

Kresha: But I am real. And this beauty which you see in me will only pass. If this is all that is important to you, what will happen when this passes? No, Jonathon, I'll not live with you in a dream world.

Jonathon moves slowly back to his former position and Mrs. Digbee approaches, a stern look on her face.

Mrs. D.: Girl, what are you doing out here?

Kresha: Nothing, ma'am.

Mrs. D.: You should be inside, working. What's the matter with you anyway? Ever since we got here you've been acting very strange. (pause) Well, speak up, what's the matter with you?

Kresha: Nothing, ma'am.

Mrs. D.: If I didn't know any better, I'd say you were the one who got us into this mess. (pause) Hm . . . (suspiciously) You have been very strange — first it was the crack about being dead, then it was the window — you are behind this, aren't you? You're trying to drive us crazy.

Kresha: No, ma'am. . . . I don't understand what you're saying.

Mrs. D.: You understand well enough, and you'd better get us out of here, or else.

Mrs. Digbee hurries back yelling "Clarence, Clarence." Lights go down on Kresha, who moves back and exits, unknown to the audience. The Stranger enters right. Lights come up on him. The rest of the stage remains in darkness. Only vague outlines of the other characters can be seen. The Stranger, hands in the pockets of his overcoat speaks (in profile) to the audience.

Stranger: Existence is a troublesome thing. It is a question of many questions which can never be answered except in our own individual ways. We question the place in which we find ourselves, we question the people around us and we dream of escape and long for another life. And what is it we really seek? That too, is a troublesome question which has many answers.

We can see many things, but only things we wish to see — in ourselves, in others and in our situations. We are tied to our visions, and for that reason, we cannot escape. For to escape, we would have to lose our visions. So we remain.

And life passes as if in a darkened room — a room without a door — a room with a window of dreams. And who can escape it, who can change it? More questions. And we wait. Someday, perhaps there will be answers. *The Stranger exits. Lights go up on stage again.*

Mrs. D.: (*glances around quickly*) Where did that girl go? I knew she was the cause of this. Now look, she's skipped off on us.

Digbee: She left without me. Why that sneaky little ... I hope she brings me something back.

Komarov: She was one of them. She's betrayed us. If she comes back, I'll kill her.

Jonathon: (*resignedly*) Dreams seldom return ...
Lights down.

Curtain

Stranger: (*from behind the closed curtain*) What can we see, what can we answer? Ask, now, yourselves. And may your answers spread light into the shadows of your little room. *A few bars of Greig's "Morning" plays in the background.*

END OF PLAY



*Life trickles onward
Toward the Abyss.
Fall in.*

Eva St. Clair



The Journey

"What's it like in New England, Johnny? Never been there myself."

"It's the most beautiful place in the world."

I have been away from the place where I was born for a long time now, perhaps too long. New England is one of those rare places in the world where time and nature seem to stand still. The small towns set back in the hills never seem to change either in appearance or purpose. I walk down the street and everything looks the same as it has always been; same houses, churches, schools, buildings. The old cannon is still on the Green, anchored for all eternity to its concrete support right next to the statue of the Revolutionary War soldier that the pigeons use for a perch. The same families still live there — have for generations. The markers in the quiet little cemetery just outside of town bear the names of those departed, and, oddly enough, they are the same names as those found on the mail boxes all over town.

There is a store on Main Street dealing in everything needed for subsistence — and then some. It is called a general store because if anything is needed, generally it can be found there. Cloth and patterns for a dress along with needles and thread to put it together, canned goods, candy, bread, butter, meats and other groceries, brooms, axes, saws, and hammers, all served up in the finest New England tradition by a kindly old gentleman in spectacles above whose head is posted a sign saying, "In God we trust, All others cash."

The church stands respectably in its tree-lined square, its white painted edifice blazing in the warm spring sunlight. Here is where my family and I come to worship on Sunday and ask the Good Lord for the help we need to live our lives so that we might please Him. We ask to be forgiven our sins; we thank Him for our health and good fortune. We resolve to do better in the future than we have in the past, and then we leave, feeling a little better going out than we did when we went in. On the lawn outside we greet our friends and neighbors, ask about each other's health, discuss the course of business, the state of the weather, the affairs of the world. The groups begin to break up and we stroll slowly homeward,

intending to do exactly what the Good Lord did on the first Sabbath — rest. As we leave the time-honored town clock tolls the hour just as it has for generations — faithfully, decisively, beautifully.

On a side street just past the center of town stands the school. Here is where the children come to be instructed in the things they will need to know as they slowly, yet all too quickly become adults and take over the responsibilities of a community. The windows are open, and as I walk by I can hear the hum of voices reciting their lessons — the sound of education. I can remember sitting at a desk which proudly bore the initials of one who had gone before me; the seat of the chair worn smooth by the bottom of some restless youngster who, like myself, was eager to run, or jump, or hit a home run in tribute to a beautiful day he had been granted. The gray-haired teacher standing in front of the class knows the feeling and sympathizes with me and my classmates, but, nonetheless, presses onward in another courageous attempt to explain to us once again how to divide three numbers by two.

For those of us who found that history, spelling, and arithmetic are not exactly what the Good Lord had in mind when he created a particularly beautiful day, there is a tree-shaded cove down by the river that, somehow, the truant officer has never found. This is the way the day was intended to be spent: sitting in the shade of an oak tree with a make-shift fishing pole in my hand, not really caring if I caught anything or not. The sky is a deep blue with a few white clouds pasted haphazardly against it. As I stare up at them they begin to change their shape and become different objects, depending upon the length and intensity of my imagination, as they drift lazily along on their endless journey toward the horizon. The sunlight sparkles on the river as it winds sluggishly on its way to join another river winding just as sluggishly on its eternal journey to the sea. A bird sings somewhere off in the woods, and a chipmunk sits atop a log to sniff the air and check me out — friend or foe? The quiet, restful sounds of the woods begin to lull me off to sleep, and just before I doze, I can't help but think that all the world should be so lucky.

The sun is getting lower in the sky now. My friends and I run noisily down the street with the reckless abandon granted only to youth. Happy that we have at last been set

free from the bondage temporarily imposed on us by the board of education, we are off to seek adventure wherever it may be found — until supper-time anyway. We hurry past two old men, their adventures long since past, sitting on a park bench talking over old times. Their faces, which once, perhaps, dazzled many a young lady, are wrinkled now, and the hair they once brushed back from their eyes to hit a ball is long since gone. They talk about the past and how times have changed, and yet remained the same. So be it.

The sun has gone down now and it is dusk — that time of day not quite dark and not quite light. A slight breeze comes up to rustle the leaves in the trees and breathe a new freshness into the air. The shopkeeper pulls up the awning in front of his store, turns out the light, and locks the door. My father comes home from work to his family and the warm meal my mother has prepared for us. Then he will sit in his easy chair, read the paper, watch television, or perhaps snooze a bit. My brother will tell him of his progress in school; I, of my adventures. My sister tells him that she has just broken-up with her boy-friend for the last time — again, and cries out in anguish that her life is ended — again. Mom reminds him that the mortgage is due next week. The street lights have come on now. Another day is done.

“Time, Johnny. You ready?”

“Do I have a choice?”

“No.”

“Then I guess I’m ready.”

“Pater noster, qui es in caelis, sanctificetur nomen tuum
. . .”

“What’s it like in New England, Johnny? Never been there myself.”

“It’s the most beautiful place in the world.”

“Yea, I imagine it is.”

“. . . Et dimitte nobis debita nostra, sicut et nos dimitimus
. . .”

"We're here, Johnny. They're waiting for you."

"I know."

They put me in a chair and strap me in, put something around my head.

"... in tentationem, sed libra nos a malo, amen."

Somebody reads something, then gives a signal.

Someone throws a switch — the lights dim — a shock — blackness.

I'm going home.

Phil Lapan



Knowledge

*Knowledge is like a fistful of sand.
Your hand seems to overflow with small grains,
But after a while most seeps through,
And only a few precious pebbles remain.*

C. H. Ruggeri



Hi!

*It's me again, come to huddle in the warmth of
your love once more
But please forgive me if I stumble as I enter
through your door.*

Judi



Age

The brilliant sun snapped glints against the girl's flying hair as shapely bronzed legs bounded her across the road. A lock flayed against her arched neck as the wind whirled about to spank brighter red her blowzed cheeks. As her heaving chest joined the push of hips against restraining clothes, creases yanked back flesh. Her arms throbbed a glow as she flung herself at a branch to dangle for a moment there. When she dropped, her breasts bounced. Thick black lashes flared above chortling eyes and blithe brows leapt with the joy that jolted lips open into a laugh.

The broiling sun's rays drummed against their own ferocious reflection off the tarred road where almost imperceptibly between the candent and the grey pavement moved an old woman. Her powder-clogged wrinkles blotched orangish red where rouge smears struggled against adumbral age, and only blanched eyebrows interrupted endless furrows to hang over two grey voids. A sun beam blasted into one void but lit nothing there — except a cracked crease prickled with scant stubbles of lashes — the fold had squeezed shut. When it opened, a translucent eye sank down again to its eternal stare at the ground, and tired sweat dribbled below twisted shoulders that sagged shapeless under a faded sweater. Strained across the bent back, folds pulled the sweater edge above her wide waist, and the bagged dress flopped with each poke forward of the vein-bulged scaly sticks. Gnarled fingers twitched as feebly throbbing blue snakes crawled on the flaking flesh. The sticks scuffed puffs of dust as the crooked harridan shuffled her way to nowhere, home.

Audrey Bullard

No Title One

*In the death of life
the we are in the mist
and the midst is among
us (who are alive), but
the dead are alone . . .*

Dave Beaver



Hallelujah Mr. Jones

Drive your car, sir?

*Yes sir, I got a license.
They taught me to write
My name last year, and
I got me a license*

Wash your clothes, m'am?

*No m'am, don't you worry.
It don't stain none
Don't even rub off,
So, don't you worry none*

Mow your lawn, sir?

*Yes sir, I can run one
Yes sir, even the kind
With the motor.
They taught us in shop.*

*Wash your dog, sir?
Sorry, sir, I'm allergic
To dog hair and anyway
Damned mutt don't like me.*

*Clean your bowl, m'am?
Sorry m'am the smell
Makes me sick and
My back's been giving me trouble.*

*Run to the store, sir?
No sir, that ain't my job.*

*Empty the garbage, m'am?
No m'am, I ain't no pig.*

*Kiss your feet, sir?
Ha! Daddy, kiss my ass.*

Richard Eaton



My Arm Followed

*my arm followed
the coat and comment
thrown over your shoulder
to fall to words to weeds —
blond signatures
of my fenced fields.
then you, stooping
by the effete earth
to pick at a splintered post . . .
now, frowning (at me)
like a child —
all lips and eyes —
at an adult apparition
in a mirror
of her own reflection,
and all the while
pruning my smile.*

*so you followed my pastured fence
all the way home
where i, opened the gate
to pass you through.
then climbing over myself,
shut it
from the other side.*

Paul Allen

Luella

*Smiling
Thoughtful
Fair
Dark hair
A kind person
in many keys
Evaluate on these.
A person,
A friend,
nice to know
Wherever she might go.
Luella
A smiling face
A thoughtful heart
A fair mind.
A friend of mine?
I would hope so.
She's nice to know.
Luella.
A Florentine person
On Brigantine voyage
She wears no mask
No questions to ask.
Luella, a pleasant queen,
behind the scene.*

S. L. Nichols

No Title Two

*How shall I count thee?
Let me love the ways:
Firstly; once, and then —
Twice, and so forth*

Dave Beaver

Advice to a Friend

Strive!

Stretch!

Be craftful and quick.

Fast plunge your flesh on the flowered bush

Swiftly snatch

And press to heart

The splendid shout of the ripening rose.

The scent will grow pungent,

The petals shall fall —

The pulp will lie rotting,

And that will be all.

All that was beauty lies dead on the ground.

Stay!

Stand!

Be quiet and calm.

Firm plant your feet on the fertile bank

Slowly stoop

And press to hear

The silent sound of the seed as it grows.

The stem will grow proudly,

The perfume shall fill —

The pulse will live rhythmic,

And that won't be all.

All that is beauty looks up and is found.

Donald R. Bradford, Jr.

Now, The Time Is Now

Now, the time is now. Strange how he stands there, a symbol of power, a method of conquering beasts. Watch his stance, so very rigid; statues have characteristic elements of stiffness. What makes him so unaware of the deed he is about to perform? Help him, help him.

He felt alone, lost in front of 50,000 people, 100,000 eyes. The sun beat down with violence and the hard soil beneath him cracked from the heat. Sweat surrounded his face and a stream of salty effort trickled upon his brow. Yet the crowd demanded the ultimate. Those inactive gladiators had cried for more.

Now, the time was now. He faced the bull alone, alone in the center of the big ring. He had performed magnificently. Each time the animal reached his cloth, he would only move ever so slightly in order to allow the horns to slide by his legs. "Toro, Toro," he would yell, "Matame, Toro!" It was a game which only one man could play and the rules were fierce. How many times before had he faced the moment of victory and yet this time was different. It always seemed different. Yet the crowd sensed that this was to be his best kill.

Now, the time was now. He never smiled in the ring. His face was stern as he studied the bull. His thoughts were almost drowned by the fever of the noise from the crowd. Twenty-four times he should have been killed. Each pass came so close that the bull's great shoulder brushed against his body and painted him with blood until the gold of the costume looked orange and the white silk black. And so continually did these passes come that their smoothness made it seem like one continuous charge. The bull acted like a wound-up toy going around and around the man. But the toy was wearing down and learning, beginning to wonder if the elusive red cloth actually was its enemy. It was time to kill. As he stood there squared off, ready to inflict the mortal wound, the crowd began stamping its feet, yelling "More, more". This crowd wanted more.

Now, the time was now. He knew deep down that the time to act was now. Men at times are so stupid. They do not follow their intuitions. A false sense of security takes over when reason is forgotten. It was too late. He became drunk

with excitement, sopped with power, and his fear, his terrible fear was gone. He was the best, the best, the best. Just listen to that crowd scream and yell for more.

"Torito!" He called triumphantly, disdainfully. "Little Bull! Charge, little bull, charge!" He cited the bull for a right-handed pass with the sword spreading the cloth. As the horns reached the muleta, he dropped to his knees and spun around. He stayed on his knees and made the bull charge again. Five times he did that, bloodying his shirt and shoulders as he spun in against the animal. After the last pass, still on his knees, he went toward the bewildered bull. Closer, and closer, the muleta and sword dragging uselessly on the ground. Closer and closer he came, and the bull was so dominated by the man that it didn't charge. Closer and closer, past the point of no return. If the animal charged now he would be helpless — at this distance the horns couldn't help but kill. The bull backed up a step and looked as though it might charge. But it didn't. Right up into the animal's face he kneed himself, right between the spread horns. Leaning forward, he kissed the bull between the eyes, on the kinky hair between the eyes. Then he took the tip of the bull's left horn between his teeth.

The crowd was frozen, fifty thousand people stiff with the terrible sight of it. There was none of the small noises, the cough, the rustle, of most silences. There was only deathlike soundlessness as they watched in horrified fascination. The slightest movement or noise might cause the bull to shake its head and send the horn tearing through the man's skull. But, as though hypnotized, cowed by the brute animal courage of this kneeling creature in front of it, the bull didn't move. He turned slowly on his knees, the horns almost against his back, to stare up at the crowd with glazed fanatical eyes. Then, for the first time in his life, he smiled in the bull ring. Holding up a forefinger, making fun of past matadors, his lips formed the words: "I — the only one who can do these things!"

He got to his feet and strode away from the bull, and the roar of the crowd broke forth. He cast the muleta aside scornfully and picked up his handkerchief from the ground. He lined the bull up until his feet were together and sighted down the blade. He held the handkerchief in his left hand, to use it to protect himself and distract the bull away from his body.

"No!" the crowd was screaming. "No, man, no!"

Now was the time, for God's sake . . .

But this one was going to be different. The kill could not be accomplished by stabbing it off to the side and into the lungs. This one, more than any other in his life, had to be finished off right. After rising on his toes and focusing the bull's attention on the handkerchief, he hurled himself straight at the animal. He lunged over the lowered horn, letting the animal's own momentum impale it on the sword. The bent blade, slicing down toward the aorta, disappeared as easily into the shoulders as though into a mound of black and white lard.

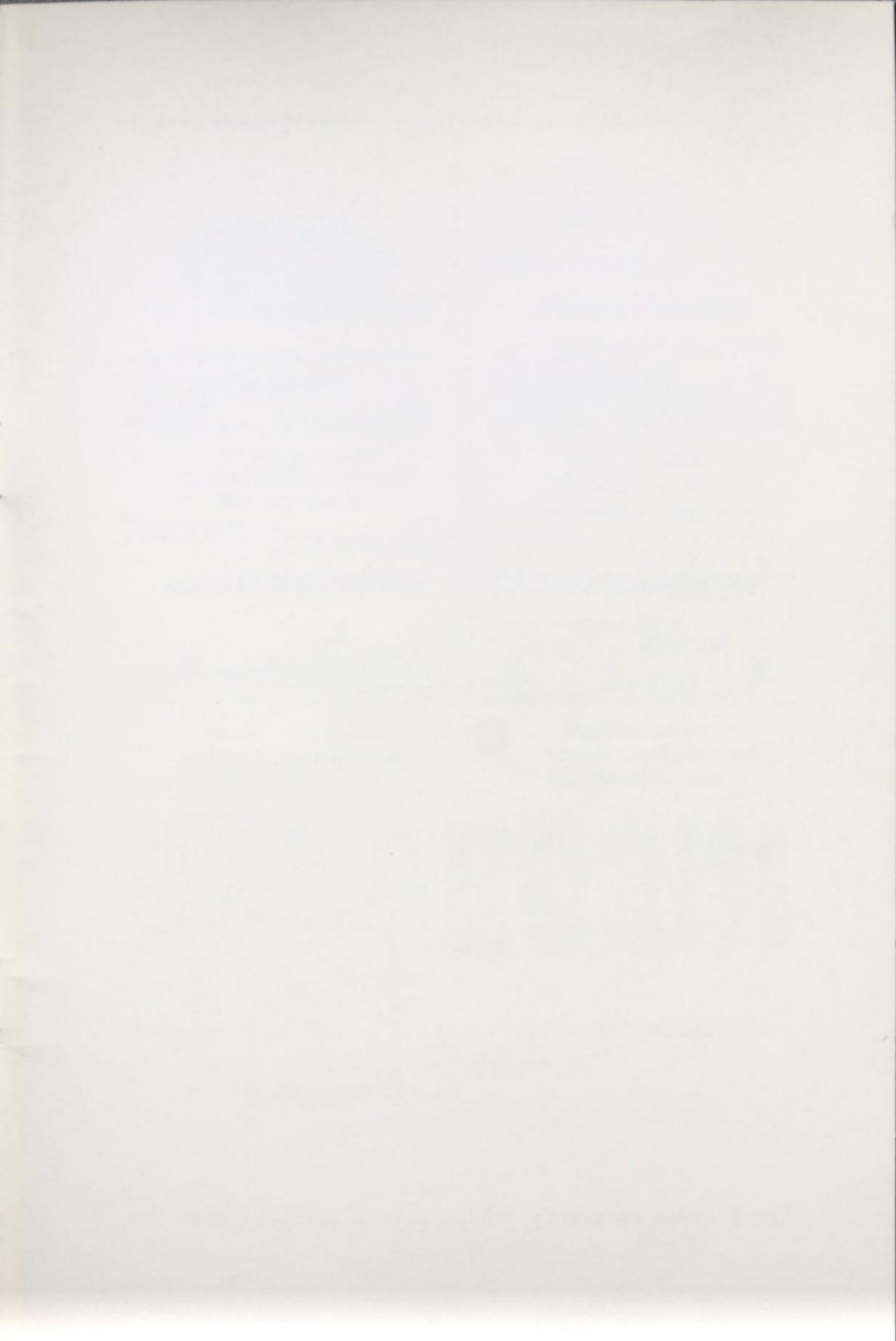
But while the man and bull hovered in one shape, the animal's head suddenly jerked up, the crooked horn stabbed hard, and the man was lifted high in the air on the bull's head. He could feel the curly hair and see the crazy flopping of the banderillas and hear the wheeze from the wet snout, and he saw the yellow-whitish horn — the pus-colored horn — sticking up into his crotch. He grabbed the base of it with both hands, trying to fight it, trying to wrench it out of his body, but his weight made him spin, head down, and he felt it corkscrew way up into his stomach. And then the horn was pulled out of him with a sucking sound, and he was slammed to the ground.

The bull started to charge again as he lay on the bloodying sand. Suddenly it wobbled, coughed, and fell over dead. The seconds were in the ring instantly and were the first to reach the figure. They carried him across the ring, and the gate was swung open for them. His closest friend helped to carry him and said to the stunned crowd, "A little more? Would you like a little more, you bastards, would you like a little more?"

"An endless sigh, the haunting afternoon
Swell in the breast of the multitude.
The sun dims down.
The spectacle of red and gold is over.
There is left
Only a shadow
On the yellow, blood-stained sand."

Dan Viamonte





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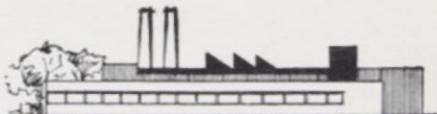
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